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## TALL KINGS:

### *The Height of Medieval English Kings*

**B**EFORE THE BATTLE OF Stamford Bridge in 1066 the messenger of Harold Godwinson, King of England, was asked what his master would give Harold the Tall, King of Norway, to avoid a battle. According to the sage the reply was, "Seven feet of English ground or as much more as he may be taller than other men."<sup>1</sup> This was a bold taunt to hurl England made good his threat but not before his enemy had said of him, "That was but a little man, but he sat firmly in his stirrups."<sup>2</sup> Yet the English King was regarded by some of his contemporaries as tall,<sup>3</sup> and the Bayeux Tapestry would show him as about the same height as William the Conqueror.<sup>4</sup> Looking down from his great height, the Viking could refer to most men as short. Obviously height was a factor which was noticed and commented upon by medieval men.

Human height assumes an unreal importance because our eyes are near the top of our bodies, and thus they detect easily relatively slight differences in stature. Today a few inches seem to confer some advantage in securing positions of leadership,<sup>5</sup> and they were probably even more impressive in the Middle Ages when personal loyalty was a basic factor in feudal relations. But even if height had no

<sup>1</sup> *Heimskringla* iv, 44. *Heimskringla, the Norse Sagas by Snorre Sturlason* trans. by S. Laing (London, 1930), p. 230.

<sup>2</sup> *Heimskringla* iv, 45; Laing, p. 230.

<sup>3</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography* under Harold (VIII, 1302). The source is not given. Perhaps it is "Haroldus procerior statura fratris," *Lives of Edward the Confessor*, ed. H. R. Luard (London, 1858, Rolls Series), p. 409.

<sup>4</sup> *English Historical Documents*, ed. D. C. Douglas and G. W. Greenaway (New York, 1953), II, 251. This assumes that the makers of the tapestry endeavored to indicate height. At least the figures are not given the same height. William the Conqueror appears in one place as taller than his brother, Odo, and his son, Robert. *Ibid.*, II, 264.

<sup>5</sup> (There is a) "low positive relationship between height and leadership." R. M. Stogdill, "Personal Factors associated with Leadership: a Survey of the Literature," *The Journal of Psychology*, XXV (1948), 41 and literature there cited.

influence, it would be intrinsically interesting. There is a surprising amount of information available about the height of medieval English kings, some of it quite accurate. It enables us to add greater precision to our knowledge of these men. Furthermore, the descriptive terms applied to some of them by chroniclers indicate what the medieval mind regarded as tall, medium and short, at least with respect to royalty. The only survey of this topic was made by Polydore Vergil who scattered the information in the form of descriptions of kings throughout his *English History*, published in 1534, from William II to Henry VII.<sup>6</sup>

This Anglo-Italian historian used good sources for much of his history, and some of them about royal height can be traced. Thus he quoted virtually verbatim from an early writer a description of Henry III, applying to his height his favorite term 'just' as a synonym for ordinary (*mediocris*).<sup>7</sup> Henry III was probably about 5-9 (five feet, nine inches) tall, but some of the other kings assigned this height may have varied from this figure. However, Vergil's information would be valuable primarily about those kings for whom we have no other information, especially for the more recent monarchs whose size might have been known to the historian personally or through his contemporaries. The only king earlier than A. D. 1400 about whom information from seals alone remains is Stephen, but Vergil's description of him as having a most appropriate stature looks like a cover for ignorance.<sup>8</sup>

His information about one of the more recent kings is corroborated strikingly by the measurement of his skeleton. Edward IV, according to Vergil,<sup>9</sup> exceeded all in height and was actually about 6-3.<sup>10</sup> He says that Henry VI was of

<sup>6</sup> *Polydori Vergilii Urbinatis Anglica historiae libri XVI* (Basel, 1534), one book to each king. He was copied by other chroniclers.

<sup>7</sup> "Erat autem staturae mediocris, compacti corporis, alterius oculi palpebra demissiore, ita ut partem nigredinis pupillo celaret." He could have found this in the following three chroniclers. William Rishanger, *Chronica et Annales*, ed. H. T. Riley (London, 1865, Rolls Series), p. 75; Nicholas Trivet, *Annales*; ed. T. Hog (London, 1845), p. 280; Thomas of Walsingham, *Historia Anglicana*, ed. H. T. Riley (London, 1863, Rolls Series), I, 8.

<sup>8</sup> "Statura corporis decentissima," Vergil, bk. x.

<sup>9</sup> "Edouardus corpore procerus, ac eminenti quippe qui omnes excederet statura." Vergil, bk. xxiv.

<sup>10</sup> His tomb was opened and his bones examined on March 13, 1789. J. C. Wall, *The Tombs of the Kings of England* (London, 1891), pp. 349-50.

noble stature,<sup>11</sup> which overestimates that king's 5-9 or 5-10.<sup>12</sup> He adds of Henry VII that his stature scarcely exceeded a just height.<sup>13</sup> Henry's funeral effigy was 6-1 in length, but, as we shall see, this could be several inches too long.<sup>14</sup> Probably a recent historian's statement that he was 5-9 is not far wrong.<sup>15</sup> Vergil, who knew the king, thus does not seem to exaggerate the king's height in spite of his predilection for him. This lack of bias with respect to stature is important for evaluating his description of Richard III whom he did not like. He says that Richard was undersized (*pusilla*),<sup>16</sup> a statement which might be discounted somewhat if Vergil had shown bias here.

Vergil's testimony with regard to the two predecessors of Henry VI is of some value, especially since Henry V's tomb effigy in Westminster Abbey is so mutilated that its length is uncertain. However, Henry IV's tomb effigy is about 5-9 which should be reasonably accurate.<sup>17</sup> His stature is described by Vergil's favorite word, *just*.<sup>18</sup> Since Vergil allows Henry V a "more than just" stature, it would seem that the son was taller than his father.<sup>19</sup> But with Henry IV Vergil's information would seem to fade: he says that Henry's predecessor, Richard II, was graceful,<sup>20</sup> which hardly does credit to his six feet.<sup>21</sup> His references to Richard's immediate predecessors likewise lack precision.

<sup>11</sup>Vergil, bk. xxiii.

<sup>12</sup>Professor Macalister's description of his remains is, "Fairly strong man, aged between 45 and 55, who was at least five feet nine inches in height (he may have been an inch taller, but I give the minor limit)." *Archaeologia*, LXII (1911), 536.

<sup>13</sup>"Statura quae parum iustum excederet." Vergil, bk. xxvi.

<sup>14</sup>W. H. St. John Hope, "On the Funeral Effigies of the Kings and Queens of England," *Archaeologia*, LX (1907) 551. Hereafter this is referred to as Hope. See also note 46.

<sup>15</sup>C. Markham, *Richard III, His Life and Character* (London, 1906), p. 246.

<sup>16</sup>Vergil, bk. xxv.

<sup>17</sup>C. A. Stothard, *The Monumental Effigies of England* (London, 1836), p. 140. See below for evidence about accuracy of length of effigies. Stothard's scale of length for each illustration is assumed to be accurate.

<sup>18</sup>"Honest et iusta." Vergil, bk. xxi.

<sup>19</sup>"Fuit statura corporis quae iustum excederet." Vergil, bk. xxi.

<sup>20</sup>"Fuit formae gratia." Vergil, bk. xx.

<sup>21</sup>"Judging from the length and size altogether of the male bones, there can be no doubt that they belonged to a man nearly six feet in height." *Archaeologia*, XLV (1880), 323.

Richard II's tomb effigy measures about six feet in length. The exact length is difficult to measure, since his shoes are hidden by his costume.<sup>22</sup> The tomb effigy is thus approximately the same length as the king's height. The same seems to be true for the effigy and skeleton of King John: the former is said to measure 5-5 while the latter is about 5-5 or 5-6.<sup>23</sup> These are the only two cases where the two may be compared, and they show a reasonable similarity of length. We thus assume that for the period after John that the tomb effigy gives a fairly accurate estimate of height. Earlier it is not so certain. Obviously the seven foot effigies of Henry II and his queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine, at Fontevrault in France are much too long even though Eleanor was quite a woman.<sup>24</sup> The statue of Henry I at Rochester Cathedral is only 4-10 and thus is much too short.<sup>25</sup> These statures are of the twelfth century, which is alleged to have been less sensitive to this world and somewhat indifferent to actuality.<sup>26</sup> But even at the end of the century Richard I's tomb which is also at Fontevrault is only six feet long.<sup>27</sup>

This may not be an exaggeration. Two contemporaries comment upon his height. One says that it was noble (*procerus*) and very grand (*pregrandis*).<sup>28</sup> The second, Gerald of Wales, states that in stature Richard I and his older brother, Henry, were "great, a little more than ordinary."<sup>29</sup> Henry's height is also described by Gervase of

<sup>22</sup>T. and G. Hollis, *The Monumental Effigies of Great Britain* (London, 1840-2), pt. 1, nos. 9-10.

<sup>23</sup>Stothard, *Monumental Effigies*, p. 29 for length of effigy. The length of the body was stated to be 5-6½ in Valentine Green, *An Account of the Discovery of the Body of King John* (London and Winchester, 1797), p. 4. Nash, *Worcestershire*, quoted in J. H. Ramsay, *The Angevin Empire*, p. 502 gives 5-6. A. L. Poole, *From Domesday Book to Magna Carta, 1087-1216* (Oxford, 1951), p. 486 gives 5-5.

<sup>24</sup>Stothard, *Monumental Effigies*, pp. 13-14, 16.

<sup>25</sup>Hollis, *Monumental Effigies*, pt. 1, no. 1. His wife's effigy is 5-6.

<sup>26</sup>Lynn White, Jr., "Natural Science and Naturalistic Art in the Middle Ages," *American Historical Review*, LII (1947), 421-35.

<sup>27</sup>Stothard, *Monumental Effigies*, p. 19; Ramsay, *op. cit.*, p. 367 gives 6-2.

<sup>28</sup>Richard, Prior of Holy Trinity, London. "Erat quidem statura procerus, elegantis formae," *Chronicles and Memorials of the Reign of Richard I*, ed. W. Stubbs (London, 1864, Rolls Series), I, 144. "Erat itaque elegantis formae, statura praegrans et omnium membrorum decentissimus." *Ibid.*, I, 197.

<sup>29</sup>"Ambo staturae grandis, pauloque plusquam mediocris et formae dignae imperio." *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, ed. G. F. Warner (London, 1891, Rolls Series), VIII, 248. "Ambo hi staturae modicae, pauloque mediocre plus pusille." *Ibid.*, V, 199.

Tilbury as great.<sup>30</sup> Gerald also indicated that Henry II's height was between that of his two tall sons just mentioned and that of his two short sons, Geoffrey and John.<sup>31</sup> Two literary figures of his reign, Walter Map and Peter of Blois, describe Henry II in terms which suggest that he might be closer in height to his tall sons than to the shorter pair.<sup>32</sup> Peter, indeed, says that Henry II was neither gigantic among short men nor insignificant among tall men, an idea which he borrowed from the earlier and great chronicler, William of Malmesbury. If Richard I was about 6-0 and John about 5-6, their father may well have been about 5-10 tall.

For information about the height and other physical characteristics of kings earlier than these, William of Malmesbury is largely responsible. According to him, William the Conqueror was of just height and of great weight.<sup>33</sup> His son, William Rufus, was very strong but not of great height.<sup>34</sup> His son, Henry I, was medium, so that he was larger than the smallest and smaller than the largest,<sup>35</sup> an idea used by later writers of other sovereigns. On the basis of evidence presented earlier it would seem that a just or average height would be in the eyes of chroniclers about 5-9. The Conqueror and his son, Henry I, would then be of about that height while William Rufus would be shorter.

For these early kings the great seals of England offer one possibility for providing evidence of height. They

<sup>30</sup>"Hic statura procerus," excerpt from Gervase in *Radulphi de Coggeshall Chronicon Anglicanum*, ed. J. Stevenson (London, 1875, Rolls Series), p. 447.

<sup>31</sup>"Staturae vir erat inter mediocres; quod nulli filiorum contingere potuit; primaevia ambobus paulo mediocritatem excedentibus; junioribus vero duobus infra subsistentibus." *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, VIII, 215.

<sup>32</sup>"He was a little over medium height," quoted from *De nugis curialium*, *English Historical Documents*, II, 389; Peter of Blois, Letter no. 66, quoted by K. Norgate, *England under the Angevin Kings* (London, 1887), I, 409.

<sup>33</sup>"Justae fuit staturae, immensae corpulentiae." *Willelmi Malmesburiensis monachi de gestis regum Anglorum*, ed. W. Stubbs (London, 1889, Rolls Series), II, 335. The French standard was somewhat lower apparently, for a monk of Caen wrote of him that William was "great in body and strong, tall in stature but not ungainly." *English Historical Documents*, II, 280.

<sup>34</sup>"Praecipuo robore, quanquam non magnae staturae," William of Malmesbury, *op. cit.*, II, 374. "The king's tomb, whatever it was, was crushed by the fall of the steeple in 1107 and all that remains of his bones now rests in one of the relic chests on the north side of the presbytery." *Archaeologia*, LX (1907), 521. See also *Ibid.*, XLII (1869), 309-21.

<sup>35</sup>"Statura minimos supergrediens, a maximis vincebatur." William of Malmesbury, *op. cit.*, II, 488.

are continuous since Edward the Confessor. On one side of these early seals the king is shown seated on a throne usually holding a sword in one hand and an orb and cross in the other. Such care is shown in detail and such a variety of measurements appears for kings, thrones and swords that drawing from life is suggested. Since several different thrones appear, the orb and cross seem standard and are of the same length in the seals of William I and II and Henry I and II. The other side of the seal shows the king riding and thus could hardly have been drawn from life since the horse is usually in full gallop. The measurements follow:<sup>36</sup>

	Height of Throne	Torso and Head	Lower Leg	Orb and Cross	Sword
Edward the Confessor	9	23	12		14
William I	8	20	10	8	14.5
William II	7	19	9	8	12
Henry I	8	20	10	8	14
Stephen	10	23	14	6.3	8
Henry II	8	20	13	8	17.2

These measurements, if they were meant to indicate size, seem to show that William I<sup>37</sup> and Henry I were about the same height and slightly shorter than Henry II. They also seem to parallel the chroniclers in their estimates. William II seems distinctly shorter and thus conforms to the description that he was "not of great height." This coincidence gives one some confidence in the seals' evidence for height, at least in this early period. Both Edward the Con-

<sup>36</sup>These are given in sixteenths of an inch taken from the pictures in the *Pictorial History of England* (London, 1838-9): Edward the Confessor, I, 203; William I, I, 358; William II, I, 392; Henry I, I, 405; Stephen, I, 420; Henry II, I, 438. For the difficulties of the measurements see also J. H. Bloom, *English Seals* (London, 1906), ch. II and especially pp. 68-79.

<sup>37</sup>On his seal William I's arms seem to be long with respect to his legs even when compared to other early kings. This physical characteristic was noted when his tomb was opened in 1562. *Archaeologia*, LX (1907), 520-1.

fessor<sup>38</sup> and Stephen appear definitely taller than the others and may well have reached nearly to six feet. The anonymous biographer of Stephen compares him to Saul in ambition and may have had a comparison of height in mind also.<sup>39</sup>

After the early period the seals seem to lose value in depicting size and proportion. They become more official and conventional and less personal. Some seals of Henry III, Edward I and Edward II are practically identical.<sup>40</sup> The same holds true for the next group of three: Edward III, Richard II and Henry IV<sup>41</sup> and even for a third trio: Edward IV, Edward V and Richard III.<sup>42</sup> In the last trio the same figure does for the tallest of medieval English kings, his young son and his short brother. In a sense the development of the seal is the reverse of the tomb effigy where the earlier ones seem to have no relation to reality and the latter do.

Fortunately estimates can be made of the height of thirteenth and fourteenth century kings without the help of seals. Henry III was stated earlier to have been 5-9, which is the length of his tomb effigy in Westminster Abbey. This figure might be questioned since his tomb is only half an inch longer than that of his short father.<sup>43</sup> However its 6-1½ is still long enough to hold him, while the great height of his son, Edward I, rather encourages one to attribute to Henry as many inches as possible, even though his second son, Edmund, seems to have been only 5-7 or 5-8 in height.<sup>44</sup> Edward I's skeleton has been measured and is that of a man of 6-2 in stature.<sup>45</sup> At the end of the Middle Ages it was custo-

<sup>38</sup>The Bayeux Tapestry also seems to show him as a tall man. *English Historical Documents*, II, 239, 253. He is described by a contemporary, "persona erat decentissima, discretæ proceritatis reliquæ corpore toto integer et regius homo." *Lives of Edward the Confessor* (Rolls Series), p. 396.

<sup>39</sup>The author of the "Gesta Stephani," *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, ed. R. Howlett (London, 1886, Rolls Series), III, 5. He was also stated to be a man of great energy and boldness. William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella* (Rolls Series), II, 539.

<sup>40</sup>*Pictorial History of England*, I, 671, 689 and 731 respectively.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, I, 748, 781 and II, 5 respectively.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, II, 99, 117 and 123 respectively. See also J. H. Bloom, *English Seals*, ch. II.

<sup>43</sup>J. C. Wall, *Tombs of the Kings of England*, p. 251 and note 7; *Archæologia*, XLV (1880), 320; Stothard, p. 52.

<sup>44</sup>Stothard, p. 73.

<sup>45</sup>Joseph Ayloffe, "An Account of the Body of King Edward the First, as It appeared on opening his Tomb in 1774," *Archæologia*, III (1776), 385.

mary to place upon the coffin of the deceased at his funeral his effigy. Several of these, made in part of leather and wood, remain in Westminster Abbey and were for a long time in such condition that they were known as the Ragged Regiment. The effigy of Edward I seems to be among these and is 6-5½ long which indicates some exaggeration.<sup>46</sup> Edward was said to stand head and shoulders over the common people, a veritable Saul over Israel.<sup>47</sup>

The son of such a tall man as Edward I might well be a tall man himself. One is not surprised to find that Edward II's tomb effigy in Gloucester Cathedral is about 5-11 in length.<sup>48</sup> He is said to have had an elegant body and great strength.<sup>49</sup> Edward III, his son, does not seem to have been quite as tall. A chronicler says that he did not exceed a just height nor yield to a depressed height and thus repeats an idea expressed about earlier kings.<sup>50</sup> His funeral effigy, which might be expected to exaggerate his height, was 5-10½.<sup>51</sup> Probably he was a little shorter, perhaps about 5-8. His son, Edward the Black Prince, was apparently about six feet tall.<sup>52</sup>

From this information the stature of the kings stands out with some clarity. Two of them, Edward I and IV, were tall by any standards. One, John, was quite short and a second, William II, may not have been much taller. A third, Richard III, was described as undersized, which seems slightly curious since he was a brother of the tallest of the group. Three, Richard I, Richard II and Edward II were about six feet tall while Edward the Confessor, Stephen and Henry V may not have been much shorter. The others seem

<sup>46</sup>Hope, *Archaeologia*, LX (1907), 517. The attributions are thought to be quite correct. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 565-70. Ayliffe, p. 386.

<sup>47</sup>"Elegantis erat formae, staturae procerae, qua (ab) humero et supra communi populo praeminebat." Rishanger, p. 76; *Tivet*, p. 281; Walsingham, I. 8 (See note 7). "Statura ejus procerata et decens singulis membris ejus, ut incedendo cum populo facies ejus supereminens ceteris resplenderet, prout Saul quondam electus Domini animos insipientium regem incidendam gratus laetificaret." *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, ed. W. Stubbs (London, 1883, Rolls Series), II, 5.

<sup>48</sup>Stothard, p. 78.

<sup>49</sup>"Fuit corpore quidam elegans, viribus praestans," *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II* (Rolls Series), II, 91.

<sup>50</sup>"Corpore fuit elegans, statura quae nec justum excederet, nec nimis depressioni succumberet." Thomas Walsingham, *Historia Anglica*, ed. H. T. Riley (London, 1863, Rolls Series), I, 328.

<sup>51</sup>Hope, *Archaeologia*, LX (1907), 548-9, 551.

<sup>52</sup>Stothard, p. 120.



to have fallen within what the chroniclers call a just or ordinary height, apparently in the neighborhood of 5-9. These definitions are rather interesting in the scale which they suggest: tall about 6-0, medium about 5-9, and short about 5-6.

This standard may be compared with what is known of the ordinary stature to see whether it was a special standard of royal value or whether it conformed to the normal standards for the whole people. Unfortunately the evidence is rather slight and most of it comes from ossuaries (collections of bones) in cemeteries at Hythe in Kent and Rothwell in Northamptonshire. The information about height is given in the reports upon them.<sup>53</sup>

(Hythe) A preliminary measurement of 155 femurs points to the men having averaged five feet five and a third inches, while the women were about five feet one inch.

(Rothwell) The Rothwell men, judging from the measurement of 65 femurs no two of which belonged to the same body, were only five feet six inches. After measuring 38 female femurs, no two of which belonged to the same individual, I estimated the Rothwell women at five feet two inches.

One must bear in mind that this information comes from only two samples and that it represents height at death which in many cases must be many years or even decades after the individuals commenced their decline from full height.

In his survey of height in the British Isles of last century, Beddoe included Kent among the counties where the average height was 5-7½ and Northamptonshire where it was 5-7.<sup>54</sup> There were twelve counties where the average

<sup>53</sup>F. G. Parsons, "Report on the Hythe Crania," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, XXXVIII (1908), 422-3; "Report on the Rothwell Crania," *ibid.*, XL (1910), 493-4.

<sup>54</sup>J. Beddoe, *The Races of Britain* (Bristol, 1885). The data are given on pp. 190-1 and comments on pp. 143-4. The evidence upon height also appears in his "On the Stature and Bulk of Man in the British Isles," *Papers Read Before the Anthropological Society of London*, III (1867-9), 384-573, especially p. 542 ff.

was below 5-7 and only two counties which had a higher average than 5-7 $\frac{1}{2}$ . Thus his average was only an inch higher than that of the ossuary in Northamptonshire and two inches higher than that of Kent. The difference in age would explain a part of the difference. However, it is obvious that even the modern height average was not near the 5-9 which medieval evidence would indicate was regarded as an ordinary height for royalty. There were then two standards, one for the mass and one for the leaders of the country.<sup>55</sup>

The attitude of the chroniclers is rather instructive. There was an interest in height, especially in the twelfth century and again at the beginning and in the middle of the fourteenth century. On the other hand few chroniclers of the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries (even that most prolix of all the chroniclers, Matthew Paris), seem to be interested in stature, although they describe other physical characteristics. When they do describe height, they define a tall man as noble (*procerus*), as if they expected all nobles to be tall. Richard I is said to have had an imperial presence while Edward the Confessor was kingly. There is a tendency to avoid the direct attribution of shortness. William II was not of great height; and John and his brother, Geoffrey, were below the height of their father. Richard III was harshly treated, but this was by men enjoying the patronage of his enemies, two generations after his death. This shows some attention by clerical writers, who probably had less interest in height than did others, and suggests that the high average stature of the medieval English kings did probably benefit them in public estimation.

The English kings, like most medieval royalty, had their enemies. In England a series of them was canonized, either regularly by the Church or popularly by the English people, as a sort of political sainthood. They gave the anti-royal forces a kind of religious sanction, a valuable support in the struggles of the time.<sup>56</sup> These included three archbishops of Canterbury, Thomas Becket, Stephen Langton and

<sup>55</sup>Somewhat the same kind of distinction can be seen in J. S. Brewer and J. S. Rodrigues, "Some Determinants of Apparent Size," *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, XLVIII (1953), 17-24.

<sup>56</sup>My "Canonization of Opposition to the King in Angevin England," *Hastings Anniversary Essays* (Boston, 1929), pp. 279-90.

Edmund of Abingdon; two bishops of Lincoln, Hugh of Avalon and Robert Grosseteste; Bishop Thomas de Cantilupe of Hereford; Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester; and Thomas, Earl of Lancaster. What height did they attain? About three of them (Stephen Langton, Thomas of Cantilupe and Thomas of Lancaster), nothing seems to be known with respect to height.<sup>57</sup> The father of Simon de Montfort was said to be "tall and of a commanding appearance,"<sup>58</sup> which leads one to believe that the son may have been tall also. The height of three of the others is known, and a good guess can be made about the other one.

The guess concerns Bishop Hugh I of Lincoln, who was said to be shaped so like Henry II that he was thought to be his son.<sup>59</sup> If his height was similar, as seems likely, he was about 5-10. The greatest of these saints was Thomas Becket. His remains are thought to be in Canterbury Cathedral, although this has been questioned.<sup>60</sup> Two contemporary descriptions give his stature as noble<sup>61</sup> and eventually he was thought to be "seven foot save a ynche."<sup>62</sup> In height, if the remains are of the saint, he outranked any king after the Conquest before Edward IV with his 6-2 or 6-3. Another archbishop-saint, Edmund of Abington, seems to have been 5-11 tall.<sup>63</sup> In spite of pictures which seem to indicate that he was small,<sup>64</sup> the skeleton of Robert Grosseteste shows

<sup>57</sup>For the first see F. M. Powicke, *Stephen Langton* (Oxford, 1928), p. 1.

<sup>58</sup>M. Creighton, *Life of Simon de Montfort* (Oxford, 1876), p. 15. His source is not given.

<sup>59</sup>"Nisi esset iste filius ejus, quod etiam corporis forma consimilis fateri probatur." *Magna Vita S. Hugonis episcopi Lincolnensis*, ed. J. F. Dimock (London, 1864, Rolls Series), p. 76. Both were quite fat.

<sup>60</sup>W. P. Thornton, "Surgical Report on a Skeleton found in the Crypt of Canterbury Cathedral," *Archaeologia Cantiana*, XVIII (1889), 257-260; C. F. Routledge, "The Bones of Archbishop Becket," *ibid.*, XXI (1895), 73-80.

<sup>61</sup>*Memorials of Thomas Becket* (Rolls Series) II, 302; III, 17. His height is not mentioned in III, 164; IV, 5, 8, 82 and 269.

<sup>62</sup>G. G. Coulton, *Life in the Middle Ages*, II (Cambridge, 1929), p. 117. This was in the time of the very tall king, Edward IV.

<sup>63</sup>W. Wallace, *St. Edmund of Canterbury* (London, 1893), p. 94.

<sup>64</sup>S. H. Thomson, "Two Early Portraits of Robert Grosseteste," *Medievalia et Humanistica*, VIII (1954), 20-1. A third and later portrait is reproduced in A. C. Crombie, *Robert Grosseteste and the Origins of Experimental Science* (Oxford, 1953) on frontespiece.

him about 6-1 in height.<sup>65</sup>

These anti-royal saints may be compared with their opposite royal numbers. Thomas Becket, if properly identified, obviously towered above Henry II. Hugh of Avalon, as has been stated, looked much like Henry II and thus would have been shorter than Richard I. Although the height of Stephen Langton is unknown, it could hardly have been shorter than that of King John. Both Edmund of Abingdon and Robert Grosseteste must have been taller than Henry III, and Simon Montfort may well have been also. Edward II was relatively tall and may have been taller than Thomas of Lancaster. In the struggle for inches, Richard I is probably the only king who had an advantage over his saintly antagonists. The other four kings probably suffered defeats in the struggle. This is a coincidence and probably has no significance, but the lack of height was probably no help.

The evidence about the height of the women of the royal families is naturally less than for the men and consists of the lengths of funeral and tomb effigies. Four tombs would indicate that Eleanor of Castile, queen of Edward I, was about 5-9 or 5-10,<sup>66</sup> that both Philippa of Hainault, queen of Edward III,<sup>67</sup> and Anne of Bohemia, queen of Richard II,<sup>68</sup> were about 5-6, while Joan, the second wife of Henry IV, was several inches shorter.<sup>69</sup> Among the funeral effigies, which usually exaggerate height, one supposed to represent Katherine of France, queen of Henry V and widow of Owen Tudor, is about 5-4,<sup>70</sup> and a very tall one of 5-11½ is alleged to be that of Elizabeth of York, queen of Henry VII.<sup>71</sup> If her son, Henry VIII, really reached 6-4 (which may be doubted),<sup>72</sup> it can be seen where he got his height. The women are about the height which the stature of their male relatives would lead us to expect.

<sup>65</sup>See picture and diagram opposite p. 249 of *Robert Grosseteste, Scholar and Bishop*, ed. D. A. Callus (Oxford, 1955). The assumption is that the inside length of the tomb is approximately the height of Robert Grosseteste.

<sup>66</sup>Stothard, p. 56.

<sup>67</sup>Hollis, pt. I, no. 7.

<sup>68</sup>Hollis, pt. I, no. 10.

<sup>69</sup>Stothard, p. 140.

<sup>70</sup>Hope, *Archaeologia*, LX (1907), 549.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 550.

<sup>72</sup>In his teens "well over six feet, though not yet six feet four." F. Hackett, *Henry the Eighth* (Garden City, 1931), p. 37. No evidence given. A flatterer said that he was tall as Francis I. However, all that another said was that he was "above the usual height." A. F. Pollard, *Henry the Eighth* (London, 1930), pp. 39, 86. His armor is in the Tower of London and is described as for a man about six feet in height and well proportioned. *Archaeological Journal*, LXX (1913), 75.

There is even less information about royal children, but what remains is available for studying the mystery of Edward V and his younger brother, Richard. They were murdered in the Tower of London either by their uncle, Richard III, in 1483, probably in August, or just about two years later by Henry VII.<sup>73</sup> The weight of historical evidence favors the first date. Now the skeletons of the children have been measured and might be expected to throw some light upon their age at death. If the boys died in 1483, they were  $13\frac{1}{2}$  and 10 years of age respectively; if two years later, they would have been  $15\frac{1}{2}$  and 12 years. Their heights have been estimated at 4-10 and  $4-6\frac{1}{2}$ .<sup>74</sup> Fortunately there are two of them which offsets the wide variation in rate of human growth exhibited by groups and individuals. Now the average American boy reaches the height of 4-10 just before 14 years and  $4-6\frac{1}{2}$  at about eleven.<sup>75</sup> This average falls just about in the middle of the ages of the boys. This raises the question whether the boys would probably be taller or shorter than children of men growing toward an average adult height of about 5-8. Since their father, Edward IV, was the tallest of medieval English kings and their sister, Eleanor of York, was also quite tall, we should expect them also to be taller than the average and to have reached their height in 1483 rather than two years later.

The bones of these children thus furnish evidence about one of the ugliest of medieval mysteries and tend to corroborate a commonly held opinion. The reverse is true of even more commonly held notion that medieval man was notably shorter than modern man. This belief is usually said to be based upon the small size of surviving armor which, of course, was worn by the knightly class in the Middle Ages. This study has shown that English royalty was not short and that the descriptions of types of stature imply a high standard not merely for royalty but for the nobility as well. That it had some influence in giving a popular respect is probably offset by the equally unusual height of the popular and anti-royal saints. The chroniclers have been more generous in giving details of other physical and mental characteristics of the kings. This study thus adds precision about one of the more obvious and important factors in their personality.

<sup>73</sup>On this controversy see J. Gairdner, *Richard III* (Cambridge, 1898), pp. 118-29 and C. R. Markham, *Richard III* (Cambridge, 1908), pp. 250-85.

<sup>74</sup>*Archaeologia*, XXIV (1834), 5.

<sup>75</sup>C. V. Millard, *Child Growth and Development* (Boston, 1951), p. 78.